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**UTILITY  
PATENT APPLICATION  
TRANSMITTAL**

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No.

862.C2031

First Named Inventor or Application Identifier

ATSUSHI USHIRODA

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1-662 U.S. PTO  
680069/69  
09/17/00**APPLICATION ELEMENTS**

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

**ADDRESS TO:**Commissioner for Patents  
Box Patent Application  
Washington, DC 202311. ☐ Fee Transmittal Form  
(Submit an original, and a duplicate for fee processing)2. ☐ Applicant claims small entity status.  
See 37 CFR 1.27.3. ☒ Specification *Total Pages* **29**4. ☒ Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) *Total Sheets* **13**5. ☒ Oath or Declaration *Total Pages* **1**a. ☒ Newly executed (original or copy)b. ☐ Copy from a prior application (37 CFR 1.63(d))  
(for continuation/divisional with Box 17 completed)  
[Note Box 6 below]i. ☐ **DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)**  
Signed Statement attached deleting  
inventor(s) named in the prior application, see  
37 CFR 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).6. ☒ Application Data Sheet. See 37 CFR 1.767. ☐ CD-ROM or CD-R in duplicate, large table or Computer  
Program (Appendix)8. ☐ Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission  
(if applicable, all necessary)a. ☐ Computer Readable Form (CRF)

b. Specification Sequence Listing on:

i. ☐ CD-ROM or CD-R (2 copies); orii. ☐ paperc. ☐ Statements verifying identity of above copies**ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS**9. ☒ Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))10. ☐ 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement ☐ Power of Attorney  
(when there is an assignee)11. ☐ English Translation Document (if applicable)12. ☐ Information Disclosure ☐ Copies of IDS  
Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 Citations13. ☐ Preliminary Amendment14. ☒ Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503)  
(Should be specifically itemized)15. ☐ Certified Copy of Priority Document(s)  
(if foreign priority is claimed)16. ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, check appropriate box and supply the requisite information:

☐ Continuation ☐ Divisional ☐ Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No. \_\_\_\_/  
Prior application information: Examiner \_\_\_\_\_ Group/Art Unit: \_\_\_\_\_For CONTINUATION OR DIVISIONAL APPS only: The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which an oath or declaration is supplied under Box 5b, is considered a part of the disclosure of the accompanying continuation or divisional application and is hereby incorporated by reference. The incorporation can only be relied upon when a portion has been inadvertently omitted from the submitted application parts.**18. CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS**☒ Customer Number or Bar Code Label **05514** (Insert Customer No. or Attach bar code label here) or ☐ Correspondence address below

NAME

Address

City

State

Zip Code

Country

Telephone

Fax



CLAIMS	(1) FOR	(2) NUMBER FILED	(3) NUMBER EXTRA	(4) RATE	(5) CALCULATIONS
	TOTAL CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(c))	17-20 =	0	X \$ 18.00 =	\$ -0-
	INDEPENDENT CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(b))	2-3 =	0	X \$ 80.00 =	\$ -0-
	MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIMS (if applicable) (37 CFR 1.16(d))			\$270.00 =	\$ -0-
				BASIC FEE (37 CFR 1.16(a))	\$ 710.00
			Total of above Calculations =		\$ 710.00
	Reduction by 50% for filing by small entity (Note 37 CFR 1.9, 1.27, 1.28).				
	TOTAL =				\$ 710.00

19. Small entity status

- a. ☐ A small entity statement is enclosed
- b. ☐ A small entity statement was filed in the prior nonprovisional application and such status is still proper and desired.
- c. ☐ Is no longer claimed.

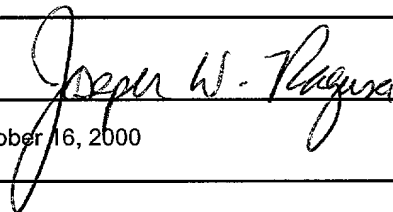
20. ☒ A check in the amount of \$ 710.00 to cover the filing fee is enclosed.

21. ☒ A check in the amount of \$ 40.00 to cover the recordal fee is enclosed.

22. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to credit overpayments or charge the following fees to Deposit Account No. 06-1205:

- a. ☒ Fees required under 37 CFR 1.16.
- b. ☒ Fees required under 37 CFR 1.17.
- c. ☐ Fees required under 37 CFR 1.18.

**SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT, ATTORNEY, OR AGENT REQUIRED**

NAME	Joseph W. Ragusa (38,586)
SIGNATURE	
DATE	October 16, 2000

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age	35.2	12.5	18	65
Gender	50.0	50.0	0	100
Marital status	65.0	48.0	0	100
Education	12.5	2.5	8	16
Income	3500	1500	1000	8000
Health status	75.0	25.0	50	100
Stress level	60.0	20.0	40	80
Life satisfaction	70.0	15.0	50	90
Work satisfaction	65.0	18.0	45	85
Family satisfaction	72.0	16.0	52	92
Community satisfaction	68.0	17.0	48	88
Overall well-being	70.0	15.0	50	90
Physical health	75.0	20.0	55	95
Mental health	65.0	15.0	45	85
Social health	70.0	18.0	50	90
Emotional health	68.0	16.0	48	88
Environmental health	62.0	14.0	42	82
Healthcare access	78.0	12.0	60	95
Health insurance	85.0	10.0	70	100
Health expenditure	1500	500	500	3000
Health outcomes	75.0	15.0	55	95
Health equity	65.0	12.0	45	85
Health justice	70.0	14.0	50	90
Health resilience	68.0	16.0	48	88
Health sustainability	62.0	13.0	42	82
Health innovation	72.0	17.0	52	92
Health leadership	68.0	15.0	48	88
Health governance	65.0	14.0	45	85
Health accountability	70.0	16.0	50	90
Health transparency	68.0	15.0	48	88
Health integrity	62.0	13.0	42	82
Health ethics	72.0	17.0	52	92
Health values	68.0	16.0	48	88
Health beliefs	65.0	14.0	45	85
Health attitudes	70.0	15.0	50	90
Health behaviors	68.0	16.0	48	88
Health habits	62.0	13.0	42	82
Health choices	72.0	17.0	52	92
Health decisions	68.0	15.0	48	88
Health actions	65.0	14.0	45	85
Health results	70.0	16.0	50	90
Health impacts	68.0	15.0	48	88
Health effects	62.0	13.0	42	82
Health consequences	72.0	17.0	52	92
Health outcomes	68.0	16.0	48	88
Health impacts	65.0	14.0	45	85
Health effects	70.0	15.0	50	90
Health consequences	68.0	16.0	48	88
Health outcomes	62.0	13.0	42	82
Health impacts	72.0	17.0	52	92
Health effects	68.0	15.0	48	88
Health consequences	65.0	14.0	45	85
Health outcomes	70.0	16.0	50	90
Health impacts	68.0	15.0	48	88
Health effects	62.0	13.0	42	82
Health consequences	72.0	17.0	52	92

Citizenship Country:: Japan

Fax:: (212) 218-2200

Title Line Three:: UNEVENNESS, AND IMAGE FORMING SYSTEM

Secrecy Order in Parent Appl.?: No

Representative Customer Number:: 05514

Priority Claimed:: Yes

[illegible]

5    PRINT DATA SO AS TO REDUCE DENSITY UNEVENNESS, AND IMAGE  
FORMING SYSTEM

10           This invention relates to an image processing  
apparatus and method. More particularly, the invention  
relates to an image processing apparatus and method  
having a mechanism for correcting output data so as to  
reduce density unevenness in an output generated by an  
15 image forming apparatus such as a printer.

Conventional devices for forming an image on a recording medium such as paper or an OHP sheet have been proposed in a form having a mounted printhead that operates based on various printing techniques. Examples of these printing techniques are the wire dot, thermosensitive, thermal transfer and ink-jet techniques. All of these techniques generally employ a printhead in which a plurality of print elements are

integrated in order to raise printing efficiency.

In an arrangement of this type, it is difficult to avoid band-like density unevenness caused by variations in the spacing between the print elements and by the mechanical precision with which the printhead and print medium are moved. More specifically, with the ink-jet technique, minute stripes are produced by slight differences in ink discharge direction and quantity from one ink discharge nozzle, i.e., print element, to the next, and band-like density unevenness is produced at intervals equivalent to the amount of movement of the print medium owing to errors in nozzle spacing and in the amount of movement of the print medium.

A head shading correction such as disclosed in the specification of Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open No. 5-069545 has been used as a method of correcting such density unevenness. In brief, this method involves outputting a test chart by an image forming apparatus, reading the characteristic of unevenness contained in the results output by an image reading unit such as a scanner, correcting the image data so as to cancel out this unevenness, and supplying the corrected data to the image forming apparatus.

However, when use is made of a method of correcting density unevenness using the head shading correction, the number of tone levels of the input image is reduced

by the correction and output time is prolonged.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5           Accordingly, an object of the present invention is to provide an image processing apparatus and method in which it is possible to suppress density unevenness in the output of an image forming apparatus in a simple manner.

10           According to one aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing an image processing apparatus for supplying an image forming apparatus with image data that has been performed halftoning process by using a threshold mask which is  
15           corrected based on an output characteristic of the image forming apparatus, comprising: output characteristic detection means for detecting the output characteristic from results output by the image forming apparatus; mask generating means for generating the threshold mask,  
20           which is used in the halftoning process, by correcting a threshold mask based upon the output characteristic detected; supplying means for subjecting image data output to the image forming apparatus to the halftoning processing using the generated threshold mask, and  
25           supplying the image forming apparatus with the image data after the halftoning process thereof; and

wherein the mask generating means generates the threshold mask by using potential weighted by the output characteristic detected by the output characteristic detection means.

5           According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an image forming system comprising the image forming apparatus of the present invention and an image forming apparatus.

          According to another aspect of the present  
10   invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing an image processing method for supplying an image forming apparatus with image data that has been performed halftoning process by using a threshold mask which is corrected based on an output characteristic of  
15   the image forming apparatus, comprising: an output characteristic detection step for detecting the output characteristic from results output by the image forming apparatus; a mask generating step for generating the threshold mask, which is used in the halftoning process,  
20   by correcting a threshold mask based upon the output characteristic detected; a supplying step for subjecting image data output to the image forming apparatus to the halftoning processing using the generated threshold mask, and supplying the image  
25   forming apparatus with the image data after the halftoning process thereof; and wherein the mask

generating step generating the threshold mask by using potential weighted by the output characteristic detected by the output characteristic detection step.

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a storage medium storing a program capable of being executed by a computer, wherein the computer which executes the program is made to function as the image processing apparatus of the present invention.

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a storage medium storing the image processing method of the present invention as a program capable of being executed by a computer.

Other features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters designate the same or similar parts throughout the figures thereof.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together



with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an image processing apparatus according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram showing the structure of a printhead;

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing an example of a test chart;

Fig. 4 is a diagram showing an example of result of reading the test chart;

Fig. 5 is a flowchart illustrating the operation of an analyzing processor;

Fig. 6 is a diagram illustrating an example of read data indicative of density unevenness;

Fig. 7 is a flowchart illustrating the operation of a mask generating processor;

Fig. 8 is a diagram showing the initial state of a dot configuration;

Fig. 9 is a schematic view illustrating the operation of a halftoning processor;

Fig. 10 is a diagram showing an example of a test chart according to a second embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 11 is a diagram showing an example of reading the test chart according to the second embodiment;

Fig. 12 is a flowchart illustrating the operation of an analyzing processor according to the second embodiment; and

Fig. 13 is a diagram showing an example of read data indicative of a deviation in position.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[First Embodiment]

10 (Overall Construction)

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an example of the configuration of an image forming system obtained by connecting an image processing apparatus 1 according to this embodiment of the invention and a printer 13 serving as an image forming apparatus.

The image processing apparatus 1 and printer 13 are connected by a printer interface or network interface, neither of which are shown.

As shown in Fig. 1, the image processing apparatus 1 includes an image reading processing unit 10 for reading output image; a mask generating processing unit 11 for generating a threshold-value mask; a halftoning processing unit 12 for halftoning an input image; an image memory 14 for storing as input image and a read image; a mask memory 15 for storing the threshold-value mask; a test image memory 16 for storing a test image

that is for measuring the characteristic of the output device; and an analyzing processing unit 17 for analyzing the characteristic of the output device based upon a read image.

5           The printer 13 includes a printhead 101 moved vertically and horizontally relative to a print medium 104 to thereby form an image on the print medium. The printhead 101 used can employ any printing technique, such as the wire dot, thermosensitive, thermal transfer  
10           and ink-jet techniques and has more than one print element regardless of the technique. The printer 13 further includes a moving unit 102 for moving the printhead 101 and transport means 103 for transporting the print medium. In a printer of this kind, it is  
15           difficult to avoid band-like density unevenness being produced in an image by variations in the disposition and characteristics of the print elements constructing the printhead 101 and by the mechanical precision of the moving unit 102 and transport means 103.

20           (Image Formation Processing)

          Fig. 2 is a diagram showing the construction of the printhead 101. To simplify the description, Fig. 2 illustrates a printhead so constructed that the print elements are arrayed in a single row in the direction in  
25           which the paper (the print medium) is transported. However, the print elements may be of any number and may

be arranged in any manner. For example, the print elements may be arranged in a plurality of rows or in zigzag fashion.

As shown in Fig. 2, 16 print elements 20 are arranged vertically at fixed intervals. While the printhead 101 is moved from left to right relative to the print medium 104, the print elements are driven at fixed driving intervals to print an image on the print medium 104. When one scan ends, the printhead 101 is returned to the left side and the print medium 104 is transported a fixed amount at the same time. An image is recorded by repeating the processing described above.

(Image Correction Processing)

Processing for correcting and outputting an image by this image processing apparatus will now be described.

First, a test image is output in order to measure the characteristics of the output device. Fig. 3 illustrates the details of test image. Each square in Fig. 3 represents one pixel of the image, a white square indicates that the pixel is not printed, and a black square indicates that the pixel is printed. The size of the image is 16 pixels horizontally and 48 pixels vertically, and the test image is printed on the print medium by scanning the printhead of Fig. 2 three times.

Next, the result of outputting the test image is

read by the image reading processing unit 10. In this embodiment, the reading resolution of the image reading processing unit 10 is assumed to be the same as the output resolution of the printer 13 and it is assumed that 256 levels can be read for each pixel. Fig. 4 illustrates an example of the image read by the image reading processing unit 10.

Next, the output characteristic of each print element is analyzed by the analyzing processing unit 17. Fig. 5 is a flowchart illustrating processing executed by the analyzing processing unit 17.

As shown in Fig. 5, the analyzing processing unit 17 first obtains the average of the read image data in the horizontal direction (step S50). Letting  $I(x,y)$  represent the value of a pixel read at a position  $(x,y)$ , where the upper left of the read image is assumed to be the origin, the average value  $A(y)$  of a line  $y$  is obtained in accordance with the following equation:

$$A(y) = \sum_{i=0}^{W-1} I(i,y) / W$$

where  $W$  represents the number of pixels (19 in this embodiment) in the horizontal direction of the read image.

Fig. 6 illustrates line average values obtained with regard to the read image data depicted in Fig. 4. As shown in Fig. 6, line numbers are plotted along the

horizontal axis and average values along the vertical axis.

Next, on the basis of the average values in the horizontal direction of the read image, the analyzing processing unit 17 detects a line La at which printing of the image starts (step S51). More specifically, it can be determined that printing of the image is to start from a line number at which the line average value first exceeds a certain threshold value TH.

A value of the threshold value TH that makes it possible to distinguish one line from the next correctly and for which the precision of the barycenter is satisfactory is decided by experimentation conducted in advance. If the threshold value is too low, one line cannot be correctly distinguished from the next. If the threshold value is too high, on the other hand, the precision of the barycenter will be too low.

Next, the analyzing processing unit 17 detects a line Lb at which printing of the image ends (step S52). Specifically, as in the detection of the line La at which printing of the image starts, the analyzing processing unit 17 can determine that the printing of the image ends at a line immediately preceding that at which the line average value finally falls below the threshold value TH. Accordingly, in the example of Fig. 6, the determinations made by the analyzing processing

unit 17 are  $L_a = 13$ ,  $L_b = 37$ .

Next, the analyzing processing unit 17 correlates the line numbers of the read image and the print elements that printed these lines (step S53). As set forth above, the test image is printed by scanning the printhead three times. Accordingly, letting  $L$  represent the total number of print elements, a line number  $L(i)$  of an image printed by an  $i^{\text{th}}$  print element in an area that has been recorded by the second scan can be found from the following equation:

$$L(i) = (L_a + L_b - N)/2 + i \quad (i = 0, \dots, N-1)$$

because  $(L_a + L_b)/2$  represents a center position printed by the printhead at the time of the second scan and  $(L_a + L_b)/2 - N/2$  represents the position of the  $0^{\text{th}}$  print element at this time.

The procedure through which a mask is generated will be described with reference to the flowchart of Fig. 7. In this embodiment, mask size is assumed to be 16 pixels in both the horizontal and vertical directions.

First, the dot configuration of a first level is decided (step S70). Here the first dot is placed at the upper-left corner, as shown in Fig. 8. Next, the mask memory 15 is initialized (step S71). That is, the mask value of the first dot position (0,0) is set to 254 and the other mask values are set to 255. Next, potential

is initialized (step S72). It is assumed that the potential is given by the following function  $f(r)$  with respect to a distance  $r$  from the dot position:

$$f(r) = -0.41r + 1.21 \quad (r \leq 2)$$

5  $f(r) = 2.76e^{-r} \quad (2 < r \leq 10)$

$$f(r) = 0 \quad (r > 10)$$

For the dot position  $(0,0)$ , potential  $P(x,y)$  corresponding to a mask position  $(x,y)$  is found from the following equation:

10 
$$P(x,y) = A[L(0)] \cdot f(\sqrt{x^2 + y^2})$$

Wherein  $A[L(0)]$  is an average value of read image at line  $L(0)$ .

Next, the position of smallest potential is retrieved and a dot is added to this position (step S73). For example, when setting an eleventh dot, the eleventh dot becomes smallest at a position farthest from each of the ten dots that are already set. If there are a plurality of positions having the minimum value of potential, one of these positions is selected at random.

20 Next, the mask values corresponding to the positions of all dots inclusive of the newly added dot are decremented by one (step S74). This is followed by adding in the potential regarding the newly added dot (step S75). If the position of the added dot is

25  $(x_0, y_0)$ , then the new potential is found in accordance with the following equation:



$$P(x,y) \leftarrow P(x,y) + A[L(y_0)] \cdot f(\sqrt{(x-x_0)^2 - (y-y_0)^2})$$

Steps S73, S74 and S75 are repeated until dots are added to all pixels positions of the mask. A threshold-value mask is thus generated.

5 By thus weighting the potential by the average value of the line, a higher potential is produced for a line having a high average value. The effect of this is that it becomes difficult to add a new dot onto a line having a high average value.

10 Fig. 9 is a schematic view illustrating a halftoning process. Individual pixels 90 of an input image have the pixel values indicated by the assigned numerals. Individual pixels 91 of a threshold-value mask have the threshold values indicated by the assigned  
15 numerals. An output image has individual pixels 92. A numeral 0 indicates that the corresponding pixel is not printed, while a numeral 1 indicates that the corresponding pixel is printed. The halftoning unit compares the content of the image memory and the content  
20 of the mask pixel by pixel and, if a pixel value in the image memory is equal to or greater than the corresponding value of the mask, drives the print element to thereby print the relevant pixel.

Thus, in accordance with the first embodiment, it  
25 is possible to reduce band-like density unevenness by generating a threshold-value mask that cancels out line-

by-line density unevenness ascribable to the characteristics of the printer.

[Second Embodiment]

The first embodiment corrects for a variation in  
5 density for each print element. In a second embodiment,  
it is possible to correct for printing position  
deviation for each print element.

The procedure for correcting and outputting an  
image using the image processing apparatus shown in Fig.  
10 1 will be described again.

First, a test image is output in order to measure  
the characteristics of the output device. Fig. 10  
illustrates the details of test image. As in Fig. 3, a  
white square 30 indicates that the pixel is not printed  
15 and a black square 31 indicates that the pixel is  
printed. As will be apparent from Fig. 10, the test  
image in this embodiment is composed of blocks a to d  
having patterns that differ from one another. Further,  
the size of the test image is 48 pixels horizontally and  
20 32 pixels vertically, and the test image is printed on  
the print medium by scanning the printhead of Fig. 2 two  
times.

Next, the result of outputting the test image is  
read by the image reading processing unit 10. In this  
25 embodiment, the reading resolution of the image reading  
processing unit 10 is assumed to be the same as the

output resolution of the printer 13 and it is assumed that 256 levels can be read for each pixel. Fig. 11 illustrates an example of the image read by the image reading processing unit 10.

5       Next, the output characteristic of each print element is analyzed by the analyzing processing unit 17. Fig. 12 is a flowchart illustrating processing executed by the analyzing processing unit 17.

As shown in Fig. 12, the analyzing processing unit  
10   17 first divides the read image data into four blocks 111, 112, 113, 114 corresponding to the blocks a, b, c, d of the test image (step S120). When the read image data is divided into these blocks, a space which takes into account a deviation in position at reading time is  
15   provided between neighboring blocks and each block is set to have a width sufficient for calculation of an average value.

Next, the analyzing processing unit 17 initializes the print-element numbers of each block (step S121). In  
20   the test image of this embodiment, print elements 12, 0, 4, 8, 12 in block a, print elements 12, 1, 5, 9, 13 in block b, print elements 12, 2, 6, 10, 14 in block c and print elements 12, 3, 7, 11, 15 in block d are printed. The blocks 111 to 114 in Fig. 11 correspond to the  
25   blocks a to d, respectively, in Fig. 10.

Reference will be had to Fig. 13 to describe

processing regarding block 111, which is regarded as  
being representative of all of the blocks 111 to 114.

First, the analyzing processing unit 17 finds the  
line number at which the average value of the pixels on  
the line is greater than a threshold value TH (step 123)  
and stores this line number (step S124). If the average  
value of pixels on a line does not exceed the threshold  
value TH, the analyzing processing unit 17 increments  
the line number (step S126) and evaluates the next line.

At steps S125 and S127, the analyzing processing  
unit 17 determines whether the average pixel value of  
the next line exceeds the threshold value TH and  
successively stores the line numbers for which the  
average pixel value continually exceed the threshold  
value TH.

If a line for which the average pixel value is  
equal to or less than the threshold value TH is found at  
step S127 ("YES" at step S127), then the analyzing  
processing unit 17 calculates the barycenters C with  
regard to the lines, the line numbers of which were  
stored at step S124, for which the average pixel value  
continually exceeded the threshold value TH, and stores  
the barycenter (step S128). The barycenter C is found  
in accordance with the following equation:

$$C = \sum_{y=0}^{H-1} y \cdot A(y) / \sum_{y=0}^{H-1} A(y)$$

where  $A(y)$  represents the average pixel value of line  $y$  and  $H$  represents the number of lines for which the threshold value is exceeded.

Fig. 13 is a graph of the average pixel values of lines in block 111. As shown in Fig. 13, line numbers are plotted along the horizontal axis and average values of pixels along the vertical axis. In this case, lines on which the print element 12 prints the first time correspond to the three lines 131, 132, 133 for which the threshold value  $TH$  is exceeded, and the position of the barycenter of these three average values is calculated. The position of the barycenter corresponding to the initial print element represents a reference position and is denoted by  $C0$ . In Fig. 13, the separation between lines is inadequate at  $TH = 50$  and the precision of the barycenter is too low at  $TH = 100$ . Accordingly, the threshold value  $TH$  is set to 60.

Next, the analyzing processing unit 17 determines whether the barycenter calculation processing is finished for all print elements corresponding to the block (step S129). If processing is not finished ("NO" at step S129), the analyzing processing unit 17 updates the number of the print element (in the manner  $12 \rightarrow 0 \rightarrow 4 \rightarrow 8 \rightarrow 12$  in the case of block 111) (step S130) and then repeats the above-described processing from step S123 onward, thereby obtaining the barycentric position

of each print element.

The foregoing processing is applied to the remaining blocks 112 to 114 and a relative value  $C(i)$  from the reference position  $C_0$  of the barycentric position of each print element  $i$ , namely  $C(i)-C_0$ , is delivered to the mask generator.

(Mask Generation Processing)

The procedure for generating a mask will be described with reference to Fig. 7. The size of the mask is assumed to be 16 pixels in both the horizontal and vertical directions.

First, the dot configuration of a first level is decided (step S70). Here the first dot is placed at the upper-left corner, as shown in Fig. 8. Next, the mask memory 15 is initialized (step S71). That is, the mask value of the first dot position (0,0) is set to 254 and the other mask values are set to 255. Next, potential is initialized (step S72). It is assumed that the potential is given by the following function  $f(r)$  with respect to a distance  $r$  from the dot position:

$$f(r) = -0.41r + 1.21 \quad (r \leq 2)$$

$$f(r) = 2.76e^{-r} \quad (2 < r \leq 10)$$

$$f(r) = 0 \quad (r > 10)$$

For the dot position (0,0), potential  $P(x,y)$  corresponding to a mask position (x,y) is found from the following equation:

$$P(x,y)=f[\sqrt{x^2+c(y)^2}]$$

Next, the position of smallest potential is retrieved and a dot is added to this position (step S73). If there are a plurality of positions having the minimum value of potential, one of these positions is selected at random. Next, the mask values corresponding to the positions of all dots inclusive of the newly added dot are decremented by one (step S74). This is followed by adding in the potential regarding the newly added dot (step S75). If the position of the added dot is (x0,y0), then the new potential is found in accordance with the following equation:

$$P(x,y) \leftarrow P(x,y) + A[L(y0)] \cdot f(\sqrt{(x-x0)^2 + [y-c(y0)]^2})$$

Steps S73, S74 and S75 are repeated until dots are added to all pixels positions of the mask. A threshold-value mask is thus generated.

By thus correcting the potential by the amount of deviation of the line, potential is reduced where the spacing between lines is large. The effect of this is that it becomes easier for dots to be added on.

Halftoning processing can be executed in a manner similar to that of the first embodiment.

Thus, in accordance with the second embodiment as described above, it is possible to reduce stripes by generating a threshold-value mask that cancels out line-by-line density position deviation to the

characteristics of the printer.

The present invention can be applied to a system constituted by a plurality of devices (e.g., a host computer, interface, reader, printer, etc.) or to an apparatus comprising a single device (e.g., a copier or facsimile machine, etc.).

Furthermore, it goes without saying that the object of the invention is attained also by supplying a storage medium (or recording medium) storing the program codes of the software for performing the functions of the foregoing embodiments to a system or an apparatus, reading the program codes with a computer (e.g., a CPU or MPU) of the system or apparatus from the storage medium, and then executing the program codes. In this case, the program codes read from the storage medium implement the novel functions of the embodiments and the storage medium storing the program codes constitutes the invention. Furthermore, besides the case where the aforesaid functions according to the embodiments are implemented by executing the program codes read by a computer, it goes without saying that the present invention covers a case where an operating system or the like running on the computer performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the designation of program codes and implements the functions according to the embodiments.



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It goes without saying that the present invention further covers a case where, after the program codes read from the storage medium are written in a function expansion card inserted into the computer or in a memory provided in a function expansion unit connected to the computer, a CPU or the like contained in the function expansion card or function expansion unit performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the designation of program codes and implements the function of the above embodiment.

In a case where the present invention is applied to the above-mentioned storage medium, program code corresponding to the flowcharts (any one or more of the flowcharts shown in Figs. 5, 7 and 12) described earlier would be stored on this storage medium

Thus, in accordance with the present invention, as described above, a threshold-value mask is generated so as to cancel out band-like density unevenness produced by an image forming apparatus. As a result, it is possible to reduce output unevenness without losing image data. In addition, processing can be executed at high speed by executing mask-based halftoning.

As many apparently widely different embodiments of the present invention can be made without departing from the spirit and scope thereof, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to the specific

embodiments thereof except as defined in the appended claims.

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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An image processing apparatus for supplying an image forming apparatus with image data that has been performed halftoning process by using a threshold mask  
5 which is corrected based on an output characteristic of the image forming apparatus, comprising:

output characteristic detection means for detecting the output characteristic from results output by the image forming apparatus;

10 mask generating means for generating the threshold mask, which is used in the halftoning process, by correcting a threshold mask based upon the output characteristic detected;

supplying means for subjecting image data output to  
15 the image forming apparatus to the halftoning processing using the generated threshold mask, and supplying the image forming apparatus with the image data after the halftoning process thereof; and

wherein the mask generating means generates the  
20 threshold mask by using potential weighted by the output characteristic detected by the output characteristic detection means.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said image forming apparatus has a plurality of print  
25 elements and the output characteristic is an average density variation from one of said plurality of print

elements to the next.

3. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said image forming apparatus has a plurality of print elements and the output characteristic is an amount of printing position deviation from one of said plurality of print elements to the next.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said output characteristic detection means includes:

image reading means for reading results output by the image forming apparatus; and

density detection means for detecting line-by-line average pixel density from results output by said image reading means.

5. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said mask generating means generates the mask using potential that has been weighted by the line-by-line average pixel density.

6. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said output characteristic detection means includes:

image reading means for results output by the image forming apparatus;

density detection means for detecting, from results output by said image reading means, a line for which average pixel density exceeds a predetermined value; and

barycenter detection means for detecting a barycenter of a line for which the average pixel density

exceeds the predetermined value.

7. The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein said mask generating means generates the mask using potential that has been weighted by the barycenter of the line.

5 8. An image forming system comprising the image processing apparatus set forth in claim 1, and an image forming apparatus.

9. An image processing method for supplying an image forming apparatus with image data that has been  
10 performed halftoning process by using a threshold mask which is corrected based on an output characteristic of the image forming apparatus, comprising:

an output characteristic detection step for detecting the output characteristic from results output  
15 by the image forming apparatus;

a mask generating step for generating the threshold mask, which is used in the halftoning process, by correcting a threshold mask based upon the output characteristic detected;

20 a supplying step for subjecting image data output to the image forming apparatus to the halftoning processing using the generated threshold mask, and supplying the image forming apparatus with the image data after the halftoning process thereof; and

25 wherein the mask generating step generating the threshold mask by using potential weighted by the output

characteristic detected by the output characteristic detection step.

10. The method according to claim 9, wherein said image forming apparatus has a plurality of print elements and  
5 the output characteristic is an average density variation from one of said plurality of print elements to the next.

11. The method according to claim 9, wherein said image forming apparatus has a plurality of print elements and  
10 the output characteristic is an amount of printing position deviation from one of said plurality of print elements to the next.

12. The method according to claim 9, wherein said output characteristic detection step includes:  
15 an image reading step of reading results output by the image forming apparatus; and  
a density detection step of detecting line-by-line average pixel density from results output by said image reading means.

20 13. The method according to claim 12, wherein said mask generating step generates the mask using potential that has been weighted by the line-by-line average pixel density.

14. The method according to claim 9, wherein said  
25 output characteristic detection step includes:  
an image reading step of results output by the

image forming apparatus;

a density detection step of detecting, from results output by said image reading means, a line for which average pixel density exceeds a predetermined value; and

5 a barycenter detection step of detecting a barycenter of a line for which the average pixel density exceeds the predetermined value.

15. The method according to claim 14, wherein said mask generating step generates the mask using potential that  
10 has been weighted by the barycenter of the line.

16. A storage medium storing a program capable of being executed by a computer, wherein the computer which executes said program is made to function as the image processing apparatus set forth in claim 1.

15 17. A storage medium storing the image forming method, which is set forth in claim 9, as a program capable of being executed by a computer.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

Disclosed are an image processing apparatus and method in which it is possible to suppress density unevenness in the output of an image forming apparatus in a simple manner. A test image is printed out by a printer (13), the printout is read by an image reading processing unit (10), and an analyzing processing unit (17) detects the output characteristic (density unevenness, printing position deviation, etc.) of each of a plurality of print elements possessed by the printhead of the printer. A mask generating processing unit (11) generates a threshold-value mask which reflects the output characteristics detected by the analyzing processing unit and stores the mask in a mask memory (15). A halftoning processing unit (12) outputs image data to the printer after the image data is subjected to halftoning utilizing the threshold-value map that has been stored in the mask memory.



FIG. 1

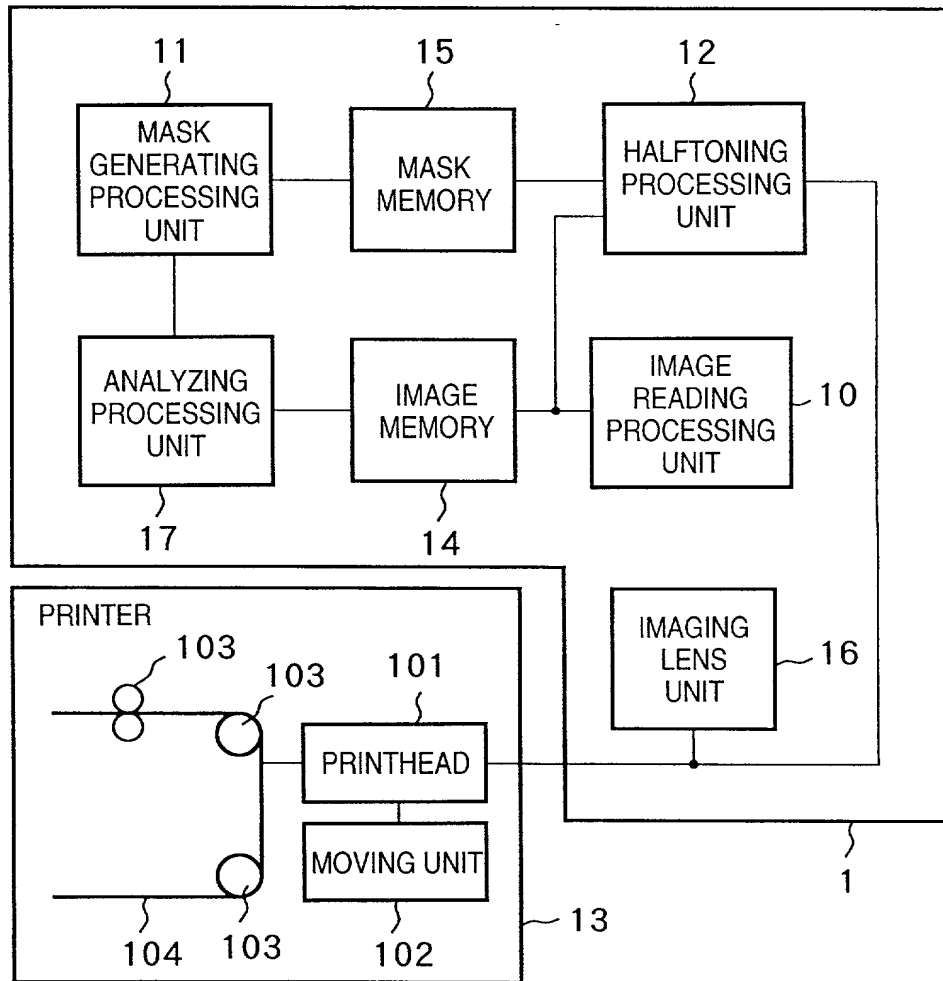
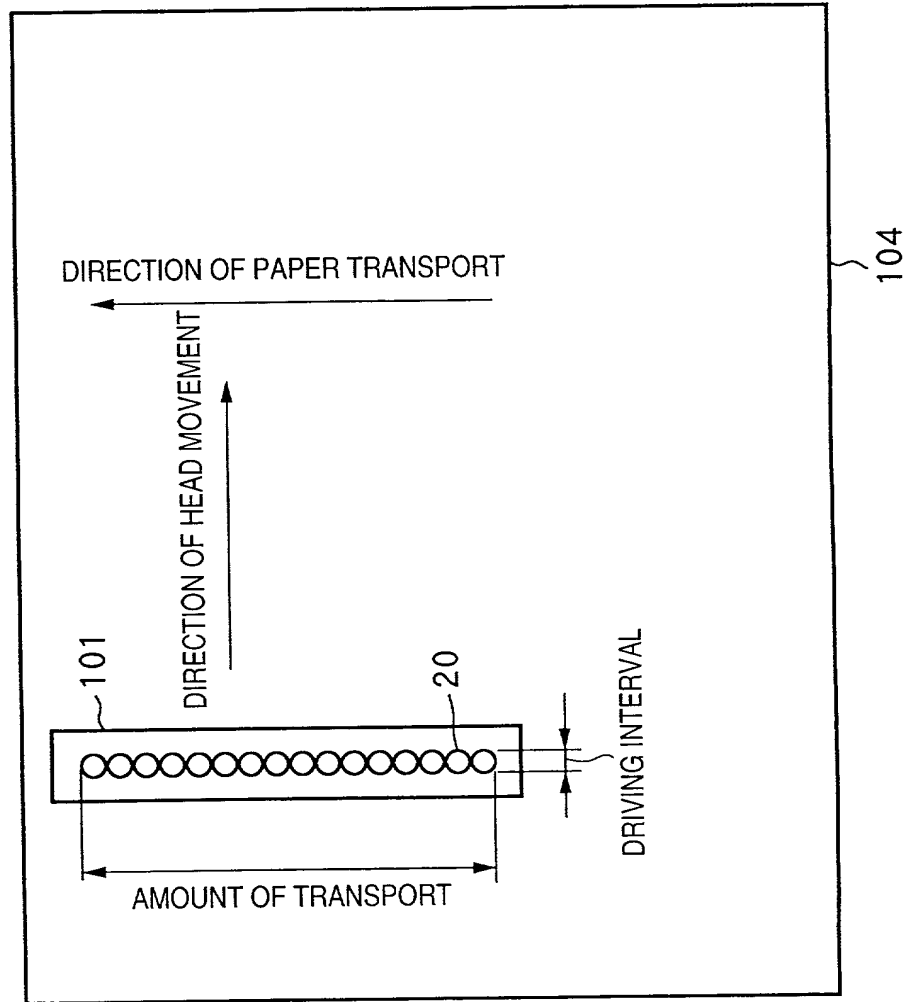
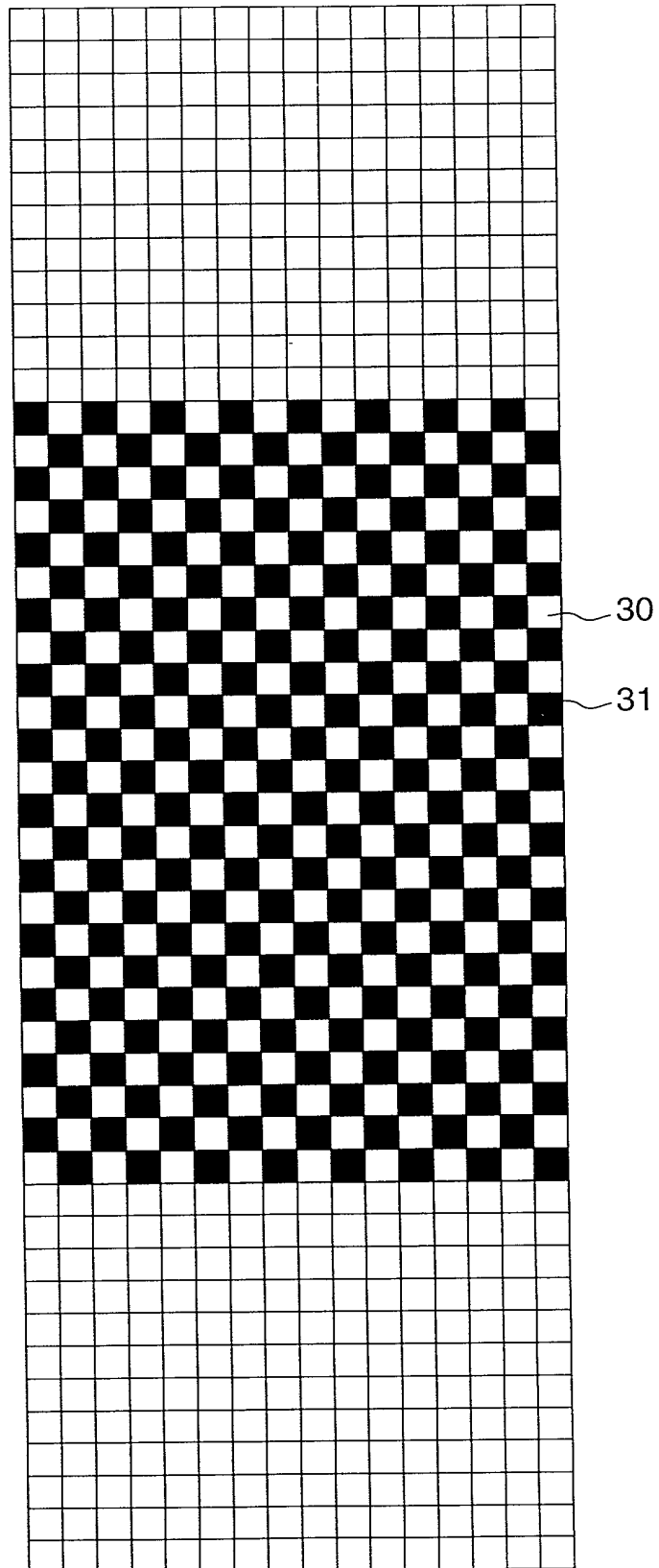


FIG. 2



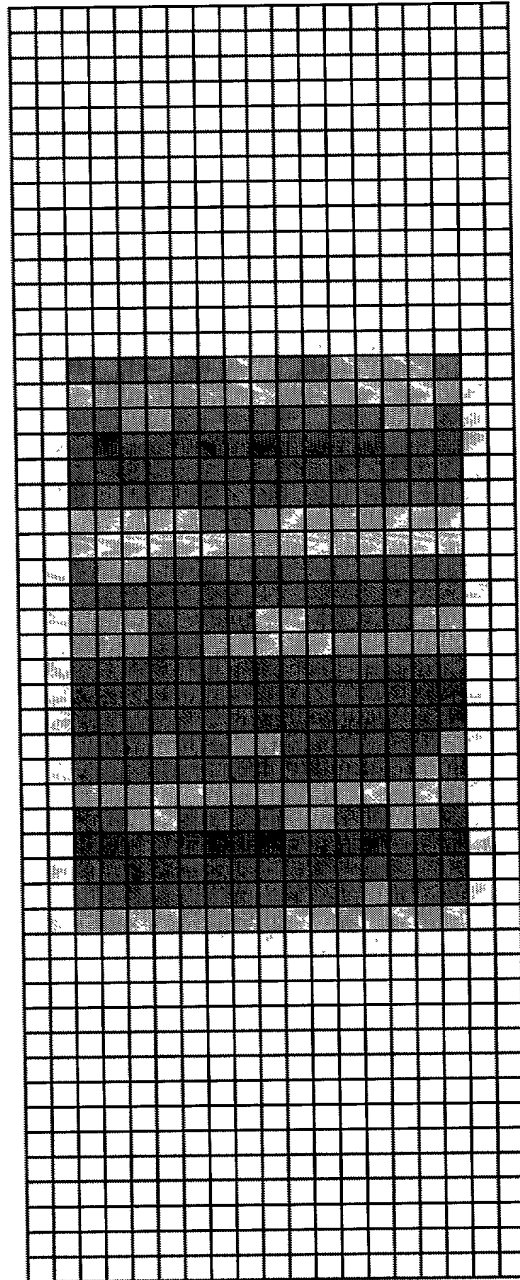
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FIG. 3



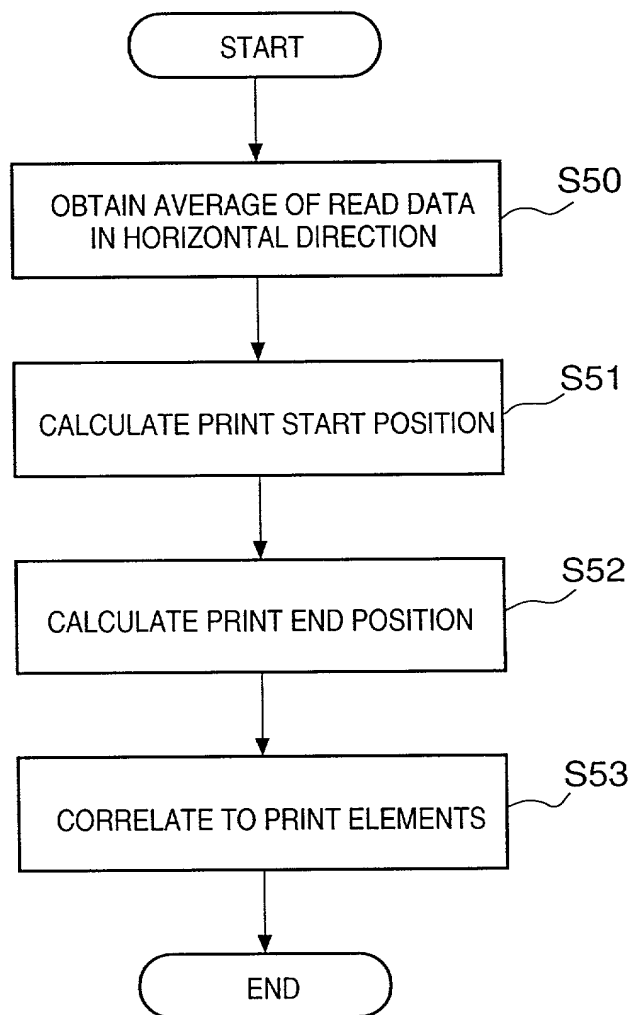
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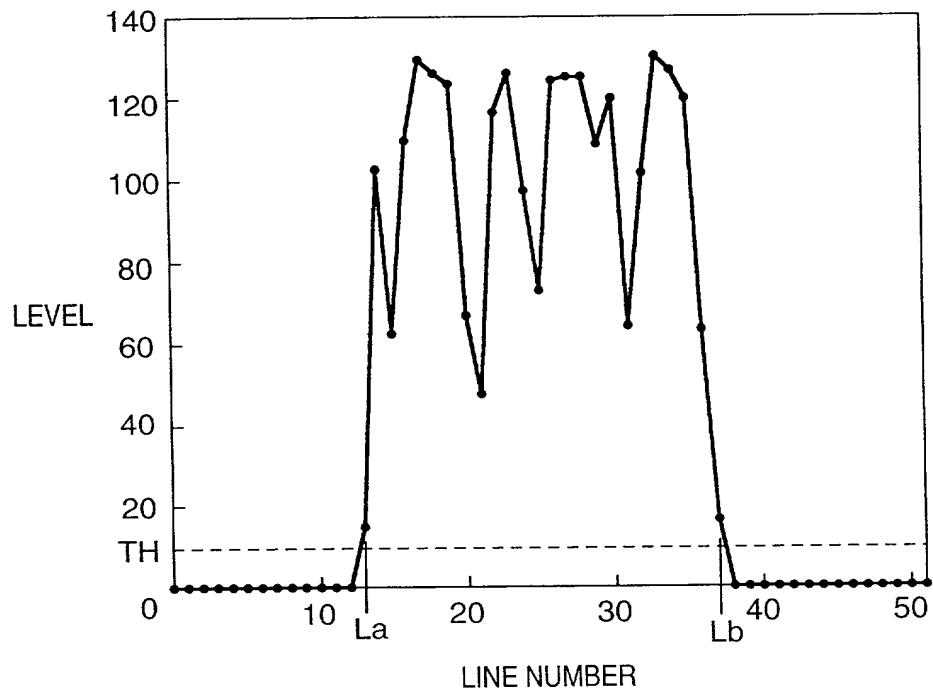
**FIG. 4**

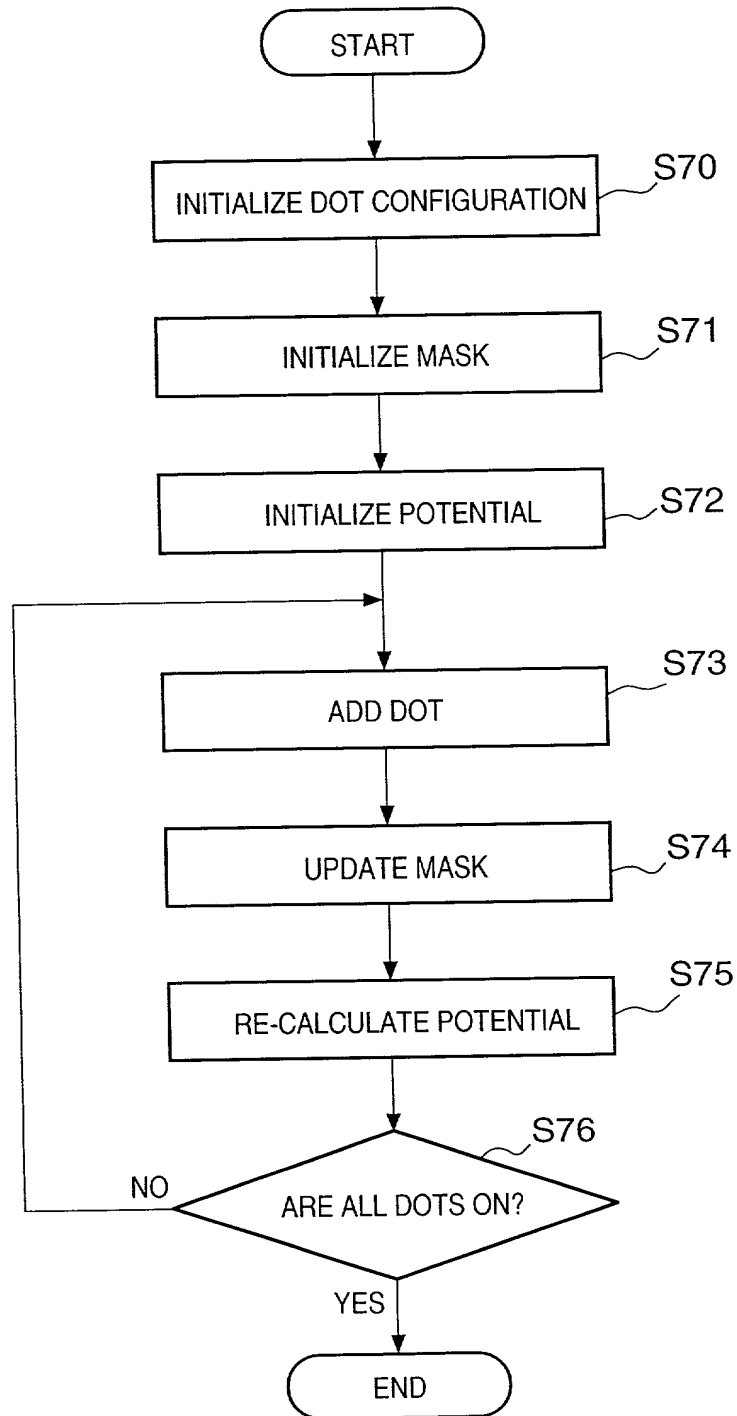


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**FIG. 5**



**FIG. 6**

**FIG. 7**

A blank grid of 10 columns and 20 rows. The top-left cell is shaded black.



FIG. 9

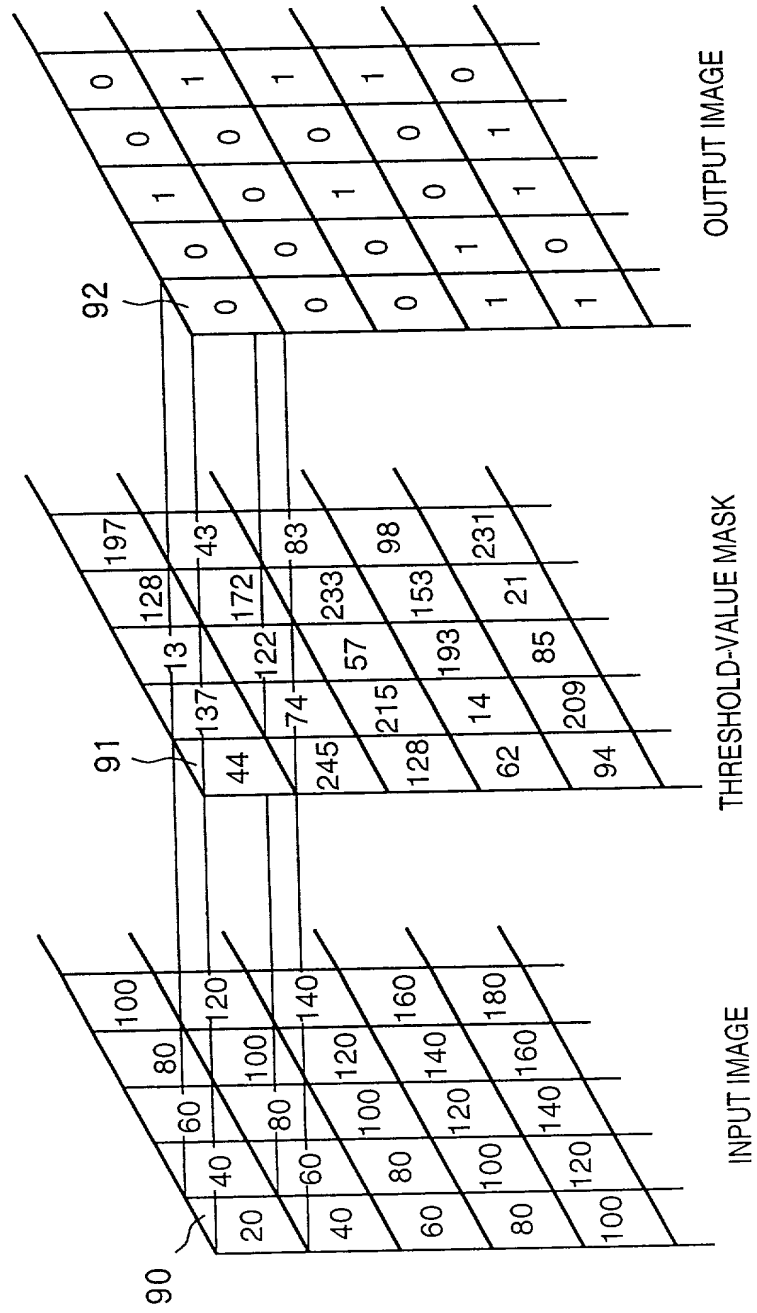


FIG. 10

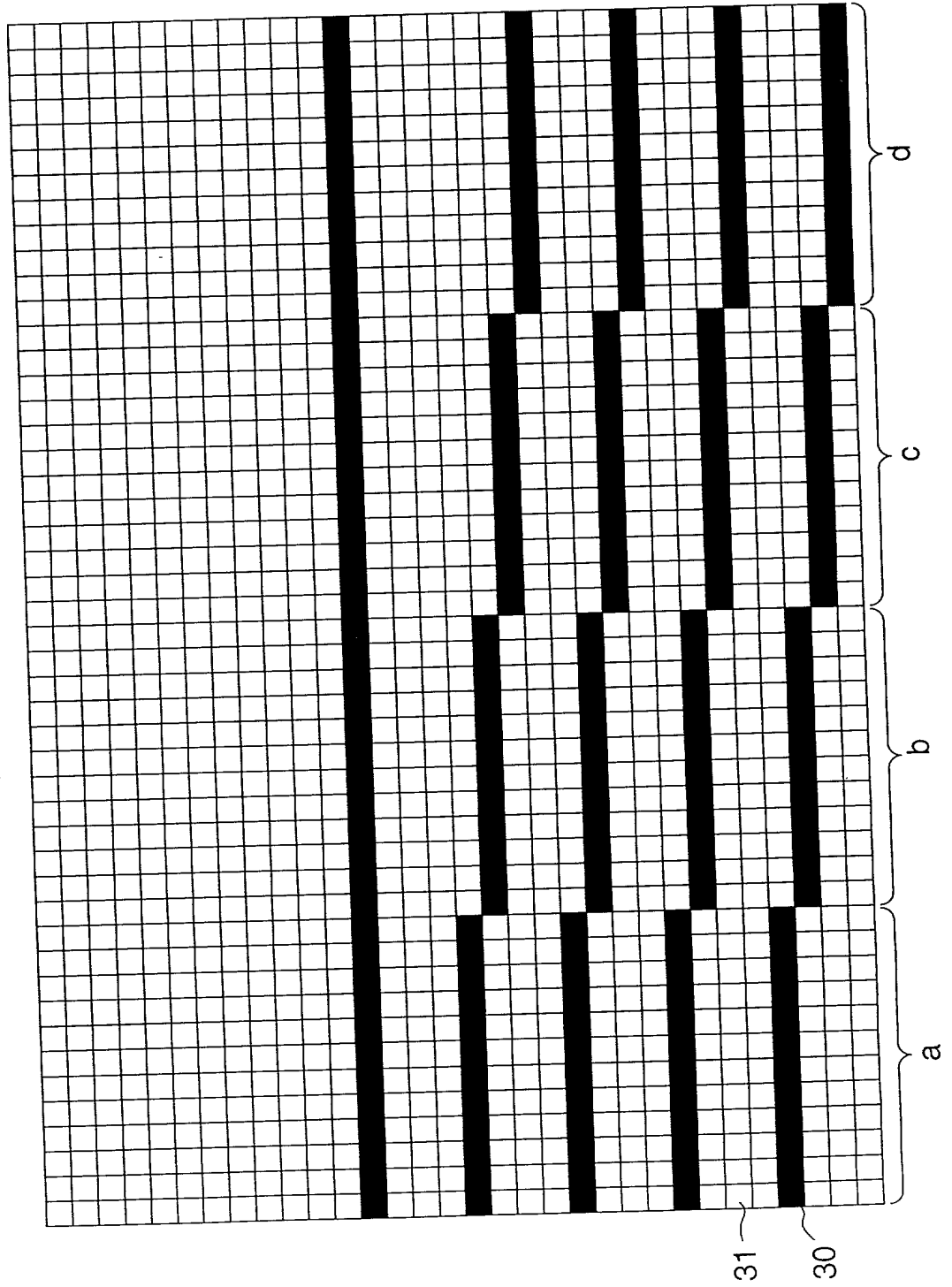
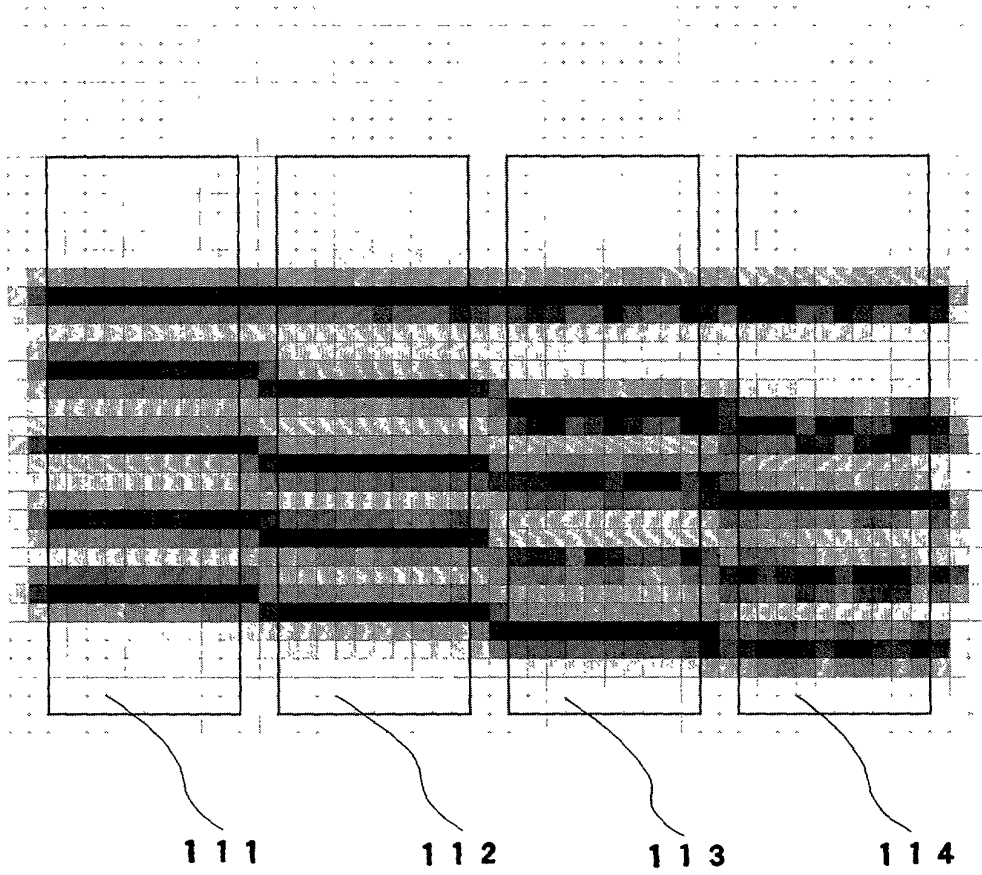


FIG. 11

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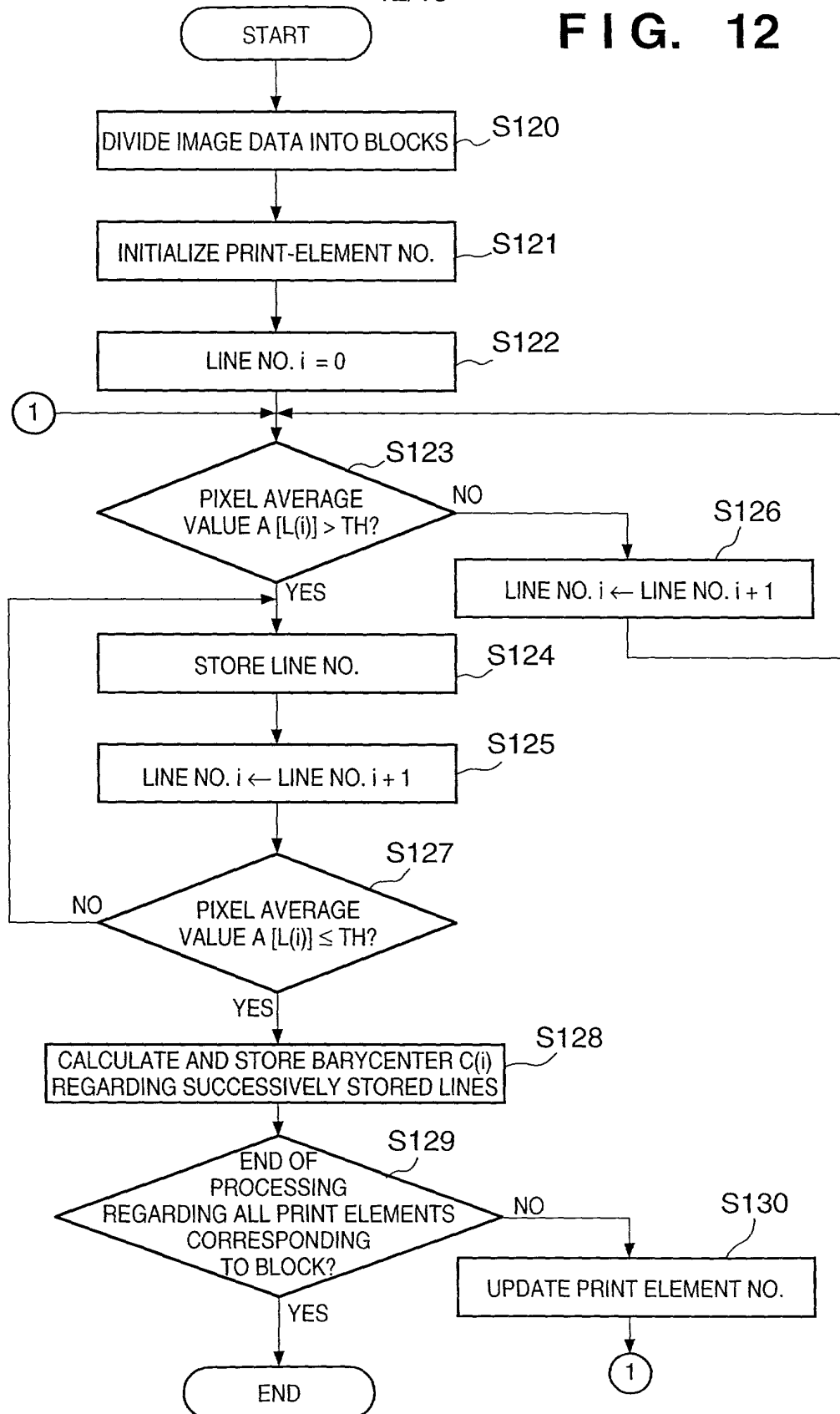
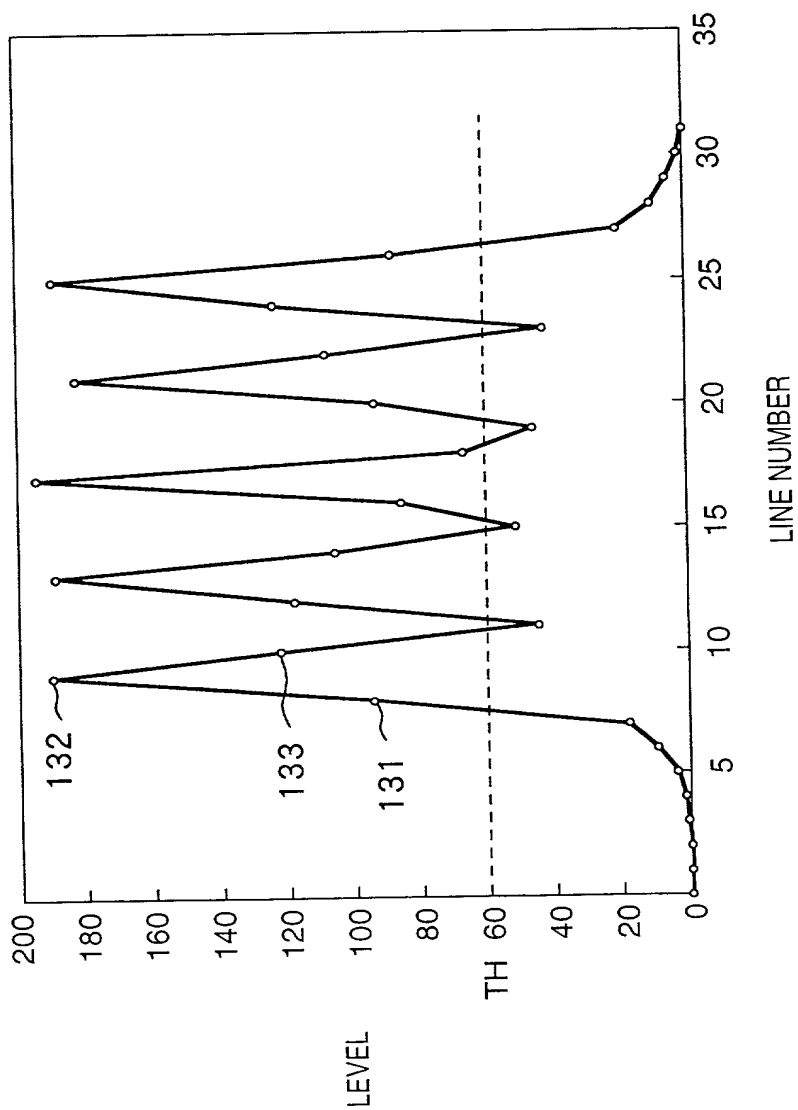


FIG. 13



**COMBINED DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY  
FOR PATENT APPLICATION**  
(Page 1)

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name;

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

IMAGE PROCESSING APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR CORRECTING  
PRINT DATA SO AS TO REDUCE DENSITY UNEVENNESS, AND IMAGE  
FORMING SYSTEM

the specification of which [X] is attached hereto. [ ] was filed on \_\_\_\_\_

as United States Application No. or PCT International Application No. \_\_\_\_\_  
and was amended on \_\_\_\_\_ (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR §1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. §119(a)-(d) or §365(b), of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or §365(a) of any PCT international application which designates at least one country other than the United States, listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or PCT international application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Application No.</u>	<u>Filed (Day/Mo./Yr.)</u>	<u>(Yes/No)</u> <u>Priority Claimed</u>
JAPAN	11-298657	20/10/1999	Yes

I hereby appoint the practitioners associated with the firm and customer number provided below to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith, and direct that all correspondence be addressed to the address associated with that Customer Number:

**FITZPATRICK, CELLA, HARPER & SCINTO**  
**Customer Number: 05514**

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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